

Creating Relevant Connections through Letter Writing

Teacher Preparation

Ralf noticed that his students often brought their favorite magazines to English Language Arts, and that they traded them around with much more enthusiasm than they showed when discussing their latest class novel. After a few general observations, he concluded that biographies of the hottest heartthrobs and stats on professional athletes were among his students' favorite topics.

Ralf wondered how he could steer their enthusiasm for pop culture into an appropriate activity for the classroom. He thought back to the time that he had joined a fan club in middle school and had actually gotten an autographed picture back; he had been so-o-o excited! Ralf decided to give his students the same thrill by learning about and writing a letter to their latest idol.

He planned to combine their reading of informational text with letter writing in order to accomplish this. To prepare, Ralf asked his media specialist to help him gather several articles about athletes, actors, and other popular celebrities, and he decided to ask students to contribute a few of their favorites. He reviewed their English text for information on letter writing and enlisted the media/technology specialist to help him find addresses via the Internet. Finally, he found his stack of sticky note pads and mentally rehearsed his lesson plan.

Activity Starter

Ralf shared his classroom observations about teenage magazines with his students, and he told them about the assignment to write letters to a few of their favorite celebrities. He distributed his collection of articles among them, inviting the class to share their own as well. Next, he allowed 30 minutes for students to read their articles and record questions or comments about them on the sticky note pads, leaving the sheets stuck to the spot that had triggered the question or remark.

Once that was completed, he reviewed the formats for both friendly and business letters and guided the students to conclude that friendly letters were more appropriate for this particular task. He took the students to the technology lab where the media/technology specialist helped them locate appropriate addresses. Once that was done, he challenged the students to draft letters their celebrities, incorporating a few of the most important questions or comments that they had generated from their reading.

The students then selected a partner for peer editing, reading each other's letter for clarity and for correct grammar and language conventions. Finally, they shared their letters with Ralf, copied or typed them as final drafts, and gave them to their teacher to mail.